

Sangu Plant Tales: An Eco-portrayal of Human Floral Dependency

Michael Joel Kalenge
Department of Languages and Literature
Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE)
University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
likomeza@gmail.com

Abstract

Generally, plants constitute the very foundation of human and non-human life. These organisms, among others produce fresh air that surrounds the Earth and provide organisms with food and nutrition. They provide organisms with medication, shelter and wearable materials. Moreover, plants are vital sources and materials for botanical imagination. Their omnipresence in literature in form of tales and devices such as symbols, similes, metaphors, satire, and personification is not a new thing; they have been making their appearances in art from since time immemorial. However, a critical eye on their potential literary imaginings particularly in Tanzania's orality has largely been unnoticed or overlooked as a minor issue. Through the analysis of selected Sangu plant tales informed by a post-colonial eco-critical perspective, this paper shows how plant tales can help arouse general interest in plants and the floral-related narrative experiences as resources for making sense of human dependency on the vegetal beings and as a way initiating a meaningful dialogue about environmental protection from a literary point-of-view. More significantly, the paper uses the same vegetal tales to demonstrate the credibility and richness of the environment-related genuine information, wisdom and worldviews found in the oral literature of the African people in the struggle to combat the on-going global environmental crisis. This realisation negates the long-lived misconception that African literature is mediocre and does not satisfy universal aesthetic standards and sensibilities.

Key words:

Sangu people, plant tales, eco-portrayal, human dependency

<https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v9i1.5>

Introduction

The Sangu are a people found in south-western Tanzania in the present day Mbarali district in Mbeya region. They are the original inhabitants of the Usangu plain, which covers 15,558 km² (Sirima 2010; Kalenge 2012). They speak an Eastern Bantu language, which is called Kisangu in Kiswahili and Ishisangu in Sangu. Ishisangu is closely related to the languages spoken by the people that surround it. The languages are the Hehe (bordering Ishisangu to the east), the Bena (to the south-east), Vwanji (to the south), the Safwa (to the south-east), Bungu (to the west) and Kimbu (to the north-west). This fact has always simplified the contact and interaction of the Sangu people with people from such ethnic groups (Kaajan 2012). Plant tales are stories whose characters are mainly plants, which through personification represent thematic issues relevant to human life including the environment (Erdoes & Alfonso, 1984; Zwaal 2003). In plant tales, it is to the plants that characteristics of humans are attributed to represent human society. The tales vindicate the vividness of human nature and behaviour. They also represent the psychological inclination of a particularised society of human beings in general (Okpewho 1992; Finnegan 2012; Beek 2017).

Theoretical Orientation

This study is informed by post-colonial eco-criticism. Post-colonial eco-criticism is a blend of two theories – post-colonialism and eco-criticism (Aghoghovwia 2014). The blending of post-colonialism and eco-criticism is meant to stress on the need for post-colonial studies to include environmental issues in the critique of literary texts (Caminero-Santangelo 2014). Post-colonial eco-criticism augurs well with the current study because of the research's inclination to exhibit unique treasures of knowledge on human dependency on the vegetation highlighted in Sangu plant tales. Apparently, the paper presents two important arguments. The first argument pertains to the ecological fact that Africa is rich in floral resources and that all forms of life including humans depend virtually on the flora. The depiction, for instance, of conglomerating trees, the roll calling done by the chairperson of the meeting, Mukhondo (that is, the baobab tree) in the "Umukhondo Gwishemela" tale, is a spectacular display of the profuseness of such resources in Africa. The second argument is based on post-colonial mentality to refute

misconceptions and misrepresentations about African oral literature that have disdained Africa for so long. This paper shows that vegetal narratives affirm that African people consciously hide and store precious understanding, wisdom, knowledge and other related-mental dispositions in their literature.

Context and Data collection Methods

Coombe et al. (2020) in *Professionalizing Your English Language Teaching* discuss the term 'context' as a derivative from a Latin root meaning 'to knit together', 'to make a connection', or 'to link'. As far as research is concerned; therefore, context entails the linking of a research activity with its specific setting like time, participants and location. In *Context in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2019), Jakob L. and Jakob N. (2019) contend that understanding a work of literature and connecting such a work to its context like historical circumstances surrounding the text's production and reception are crucial because meanings are contextually grounded. They obtain their sense in the context in which they are produced and received (Walia 1995; Seitel 1999). This fact made contextualisation of the selected Sangu plant tales under scrutiny an important aspect. The tales were largely contextualised based on the wider socio-political and historical conditions that necessitated their production and enactment.

This qualitative study is based on the worldviews of the Sangu people. According to Gordon Rugg and Petre, Marian (2007), qualitative research investigates a phenomenon in its natural setting to identify, describe and interpret it from the perspective of the participants. That being the case, the researcher decided to collect afresh data (that is, primary data) from the original field through in-depth interviews. By in-depth interview, it means a qualitative means of data collection in which the key informants are prompted by the researcher to talk about the topic under investigation in a one-on-one conversation to get the inner emic views of the persons being interviewed. This interview method requires the informant is to get ample time to present his or her outlook without unnecessary interruption by the researcher. The researcher's duty is to help the informant remain focused on the topic under investigation and poke into issues that need a bit of clarification (Given 2008; Ember & Ember 2009). This data collection method was appropriate for this study because it gave the informants time to tell and retell their stories and experiences without interruption and at the pace that allowed natural flow of the

narration. The researcher's role was to record them with discreet. It was as well used to probe a little bit for clarity.

This paper presents a thematic analysis of three (3) Sangu plant tales that directly or indirectly express the Sangu people's assumptions, perceptions and knowledge about their dependence on plants. The plant tales under scrutiny are "Umutwa Vesu" meaning, our master; "Umukhondo gwi Shemela" meaning, the baobab tree is calling and "Pikhaha" meaning, in the bush. There is substantial literary evidence from these three plant tales of the Sangu people that the life of humanity depends on the life of plants and that the Sangu people are well aware of this truth as detailed below.

In the "Umutwa Vesu" tale, a voice is overheard from a litamba tree instructing all trees to bow down, sway and swing when the wind blows to show appreciation of the gods for the provision of sufficient food engendered by the pouring of enough rainfall that sustains plant life. In the plot, when the voice from a litamba mentions a certain plant species, such plant species venerates God in its own specific wordage. For instance, when the maize plants are mentioned by the voice, they altogether reply by singing, "Nguluvi, Nguluvi shidunda sha shifuku" meaning, "God, God you are the mountain of the rain season". When paddy is mentioned, it sings, "Nguluvi, Nguluvi shipelo sha shakiilya" meaning, "God, God is the provider of food". The wordage and the veneration continue throughout the season.

As the swaying and the swinging continue, trees that refuse to obey to the instructions of the voice dry, wither, fall and decay. The drying, withering, falling and decaying of such trees is a punishment for disobedience. The voice sends the burning sun to dry and wither the ungrateful trees and then worms and other decomposers destroy them completely. The tale ends with an account on why every time the wind blows, trees gracefully and rhythmically sway and swing. The swaying and swinging movements indicate worship to the gods as a supplication for the abundance of food and other provisions.

One-on-one interviews revealed that the "Umutwa Vesu" tale was performed at the time when the Usangu plain was filled with all sorts of vegetation such as the litamba and baobab trees, maize plants, paddy, finger millet, potatoes and many other species. Secondly, the tale connotes that it is set in the area which is rain-fed, naturally fertile and

climatically conducive for the growth of vegetation in that the plants venerate God for the availability of food and other provisions. Mng'ong'o, Munishi, Blake, Comber, Hutchinson and Ndakidemi (2021), literally justify this fact. According to them, the Usangu plain is divided into two parts: The hilly south part which is well covered by natural forests with an annual rainfall ranging between 1000 and 1600 mm. The northern part of the Plain which is largely flat with an annual precipitation of 700 mm. This part of Usangu supports rain-fed and irrigated crop farming.

The creator of the story attaches the voice to the litamba tree to signify intentionally the Sangu people's positive attitude towards their surrounding physical environment. As a result, all the plants in the tale have human characteristics. In this case, the voice from a litamba tree stands for all the plants in the Usangu wonderland, with the swaying and swinging trees representing humanity in the same area. Henceforth, the commands issued by the voice (that is, the trees) to the swaying and swinging trees (that is, human beings endowed with the ability to move) suggest that trees have authority over human beings.

In this regard, Ikeke (2013) contends that in many African cultures, trees have a special significance. They represent God or gods deserving admiration and supplication. This has made possible the presence till to date of flourishing of mangrove forests and rain forests in Africa. African forests are known for being rich in biodiversity, which provides medicinal and spiritual resources among others.

Similarly for the Usangu plain, Nzali and Kaswamila in "Prospects and Challenges of Village Land Forest Reserves Management in Mbarali District, Tanzania" (2019), enlist villages like Mabadaga, Itamboleo and Mbuyuni as having traditionally reserved forests to-date because of the significance attached to them by the Sangu people living in the area. This acquiesces with the representation found in the tale, "Umutwa Vesu". The title of the story itself is a vindication of the position forests assume in the life of the Sangu people. "Umutwa Vesu" means "our master". The master in the tale is the voice heard from a personified litamba tree dictating what humans (that is, the trees) ought to do to the gods. The drying, withering, falling and decaying metaphorically paint a picture of the suffocation human beings undergo for disobeying environmental principles of utilisation and conservation. The referred suffocation is

sanctioned by the trees because they have authority over human beings. The elevation of the position of trees higher than humans in the fabula is a psychological inclination that for the Sangu people trees are sources of life and must therefore, be honoured. According to the tale, failure to honour the master (that is, the trees) imposes affliction to humans. The depiction of the drying, withering, falling and decaying trees creates disturbing images of the life of the people deteriorating due to environmental degradation.

The plot line of the “Umutwa Vesu” tale introduces an ecological fact about human life. It singles out that for human beings to survive, they need plants. As elucidated above, the voice from a litamba tree (standing for all plant life) issues commands to the trees (that is, the human beings) that whenever wind blows, all trees must bend and straighten severally for supplication. This indicates that the survival of humanity depends on the vegetal beings. The placing of trees in the position higher than humanity is not an exclusive practice of the Sangu people; it is done by other people too. In *Indigenous Multipurpose Trees of Tanzania: Uses and Economic Benefits for People* (1993) co-authored by Hines and Eckman, it is explicated that in Dodoma, village meetings and burial ceremonies are conducted around the bicolour trees. In the rural areas of Moshi, every chief has a shade of the moraceae tree under which to sit, pray and think. Like litamba in the Usangu plain, these and many other select and sacred trees in African culture are preserved, protected and promoted because they are an integral aspect of the social structure.

The on-going preservation, protection and promotion of the litamba trees for sacred reasons in the Usangu plain, relates directly to environmental protection. When people fear to cut down or do any harm to the litamba tree, they enhance the upkeep of the natural environment. However, in literary terms, the symbolic representation of the litamba trees envisioned in the tale as standing for all plant life and the swaying and swinging trees representing the people substantiated earlier in this paper, hints that conceivably the Sangu as a people respect the flora as sources of life, therefore they would principally protect it for the better rather than harm it for peril.

Another evidence of the dependence of human beings on plants is found in the tale “Umukhondo gwi Shemela”, meaning the baobab tree is calling. In this tale, the baobab tree convenes a meeting for trees in the

setting. When the trees arrive, they surround this big tree. Amongst the trees in meeting attendance include, *Musada* (a tree whose fruits are mostly eaten by the Sangu children); *Mutovo* (this tree produces chewing-gum like fruits whose roughages act as dentifrice); and *Mupelemehe* (this tree produces tiny fruits with honey-like flavour). The meeting begins with the singing of the fruit-bearing trees' song, an anthem to proclaim the majesticness of the trees' existence. The song goes like this:

Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Asikhatuvalafyaga muunu ose.
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Onye kiihuda na mang'anga avanitu.

Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose tiikhata inyi iyi yoona!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose tiikhata inyi iyi yoona!
Asikhatuvalafyaga muunu ose.

English Translation

Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Do not disgust us.
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
You strike our children with stones.

Trees! Trees! We rule all this land!
Trees! Trees! We rule all this land!
Do not disgust us.

After the singing, Mukhondo tells his colleagues about the meeting's agenda. The agenda is "the unfriendly actions of humans". Mukhondo explains that there exists the clear-cutting; the lumbering; the burning and the plucking of children (that is, fruits) done by humans. This situation has resulted in the floral community continual depopulation. These inhuman actions do not only cause unhappiness but also occasion worries about the flora. Mukhondo reminds members of the meeting of the cries heard each day and everywhere. Mukhondo further expounds:

Omwe vaanu vaangu! Nivashemelile panu kunjowo sa vaanu ni mwandunga. One nilikholela kiifwa, inyi yangu iyi yikhasigala yingaya mapishi. Avaanu na mwandunga vihagula amapishi manofu, vikataa na kigwiisa nu moto, tiigwa mbakha pansu na kiifwa nsiku soona. Tidubuda lakini vasipulikha. Ulusawo lwesu lwisila duguli lakini viyendelea nu wujanja wawo. Ino nivashemelile panu kulamula. Tihagule kuwadaga,

kuvabuda au kuvalekha. One nisakha tivabude woona tipu.

English Translation

My people! I have called you here to discuss issues about human beings and monkeys. I am about to die, lest my land remain without a tree. Human beings and monkeys choose beautiful trees, cut them and fall them by fire, we fall down and die all the days. We cry but they don't listen. Our generation is demising but they still destroy us. Now, I have called you here so we can decide. We should choose to chase them away from our domicile, to kill them or let them continue with their destructive behaviour. I suggest we kill them all.

According to Mukhondo, this ungoverned seizure of children and the killing of the existing generation is a menace to the reproduction rate of the flora. This complaint is based on how the fruits (children) are plucked by humans before they fully grow and germinate.

Because there is no win-win situation in the relationship between humans and plants, the meeting ends up with three proclamations. The first and pivotal proclamation is called in Shisangu "Lusawulwa". According to Walsh (1995), Lusawulwa is a thread or ribbon. In the Sangu tradition, Lusawulwa is worn around the neck or under the arm with herb to protect someone against stomach-ache. The Lusawulwa proclamation requires that every plant species to develop a defence mechanism against human actions. A few of the defence mechanisms members suggest include the development of stings and the release of resin, unpleasant smells and other irritating substances.

The second proclamation covers all fruit-bearing trees. As humans have no mercy on the embryo and the infants (that is, flowers and immature fruits), it is decided that all fruit-bearing trees must always fasten their children up so that when humans come for plucking, they fail. However, this mechanism should be used alongside the "Lusawulwa" defence strategy, which covers the development of stings around children (that is, flowers and fruits) and the release of irritating substances. The third proclamation requires all the plants to live in harmony with one another. In this regard, members of the flora community found in the same locality should embrace closeness in order to help each other during troublesome situations devoid of quarrels between and amongst trees over anything.

Most probably, the “Umkhondo gwi Shemela” tale was in the vogue between the 1970s and 1990s when the number of the people from other ethnic groups migrating into the Usangu plain increased tremendously. According to Kangalawe, Mwamfupe and Mbonile (2007), there have been a significant inter-regional and intra-regional migrations of people in Tanzania between 1970 and 1990. With rich soils, sustainable water supply from rivers and good weather conditions the Bena, Wanji and Kinga from Njombe region; Nyakyusa from Kyela and Rungwe districts of Mbeya region; the Sukuma from Mwanza and Shinyanga regions and the Hehe from Iringa region were attracted to settle in the area for animal husbandry and crop cultivation. This population increase induced by migration had made the Usangu plain become the most populous locality with an annual population growth of around 3.3 percent in the 1978 and 1988.

As a rule of the thumb, population pressure wreaks havoc on the natural environment. With the increase of population, vegetation is cleared for farms and buildings. Population increase further causes the shortage of water and other environmental resources. In other words, the demand for resources like water, arable land, and pasture land becomes higher such that the environment becomes vulnerable to devastation (Nanson, 2021).

The telling of “Umukhondo gwi Shemela” tale, as a communicative tool, reiterated the Sangu’s environmental truths that prevailed in the past (that is in the years between the 1970s and 1990s). It expresses human actions, history, experiences, life events and other complexities of the relations existing between human beings and their environment. Moreover, the “Umukhondo gwi Shemela” tale situates the current state of the environment of the Usangu plain as being the repercussion of population pressure and the introduction into the Usangu plain of the environmentally unfriendly cultures brought about by the inhabitation of people from ethnic groups other than the Sangu. It also interweaves the past and the present environmental facts in order to warn very strongly the present generation on the need to rejuvenate the environmental consciousness that prevailed in the past.

The storyline of the “Umukhondo gwi Shemela” tale and the accompanied literary appreciation show clearly that human life depends on the life of the flora. It is fascinating to find from the storyline and the

analysis of the tale that the Sangu are mindful of the fact that their lives depend on plants. They are conscious of the ecological realness that any destruction posed on the environment, threatens the well-being of humanity. The meeting summoned by Mr. Mukhondo and the resolutions passed by the meeting are justifications of the awareness of the Sangu that without plants, there is no survival on the human side.

Another tale entitled “Pikhaha” meaning, in the bush, plants are as well recognised as sources of life to human beings. The plants are depicted as divine beings communicating with God directly about life on earth. The plants provide humans with almost every basic need. This is portrayed at the beginning of the narrations as follows:

Pamwandi iwusangu yaali nofu sana. Gakhwaali amapishi manofu gegagubikhwe na makhamba pashanya poona. Amapishi ga wusangu gahalonganige nu Nguluwi na khileti nonya. Avasangu vakhapatige magoda mumapishi na mumasoli mwikhaha umo. Avasangu penevahisakha mugoda na mapishi gakujengela inyumba, vawombaga khwa mapishi ga mumakhaha...

English Translation

Long time ago, Usangu was very beautiful. There were beautiful trees with beautiful canopies everywhere. The trees of Usangu were speaking to God and God brought rainfall. The Sangu got medicines in the bush. When the Sangu people wanted medicines and trees for building houses, they asked for such needs from the trees of the bush...

In the tale, plants have power to heal and kill, thanks to the attribute of personification. In the tale, humans kneel down in an idolized way asking plants to allow them utilise the plant resources. The master of all plants, Mukhondo or the baobab proclaims must-follow principles if humans need services from the flora for survival. Of the many principles laid down is the pre-requisite to respect the natural environment. By “respect” Mukhondo says, “to love us and to protect us from stupid humans.” The human characters respond to Mukhondo’s directives with a promise to befriend the environment.

In the first days after the agreement with Mukhondo, humans live a happy life because they get every provision from the flora. They get honey, firewood, fruits, and bush meat. They are also free to use roots, leaves and barks of trees for medication. They are allowed to cut down trees for cultivation with a condition to leave a few trees uncut in every farmland. Therefore, life progresses well because of the existing harmony

between humans and the flora.

However, the *fabula* ends with the portrait of humans wantonly clearing bushes, hence subjecting the soil to erosion. Human beings irresponsibly burn forests and bushes, causing deaths of plants and other organisms. They are also depicted invading forests reserved for ritualistic activities and forcing into the territories of wild animals for hunting and recreation. This abuse and overexploitation of environmental resources provokes the anger of the flora community. The flora decides to counterattack humans with diseases of all types such as Malaria and tuberculosis.

The “Pikhaha” tale showcases the reality of the dependence of humans on plants. The mythos presented on the tale reveals an ecological reality that there are enormous benefits of plants from which humans make their survival possible. However, it is an incontestable reality that the said dependence makes sense when the human section of the ecosystem utilizes the environment and its resources responsibly. It punctuates further that the Sangu people were aware of the benefits they got from plants and had developed a culture to respect the environment. Nevertheless, as stated in the discussion of the “Umukhondo Gwishemela” tale above, with the migration of other ethnic groups into the Usangu plain and the mingling of cultures, the environment suffers depletion.

Nanson (2021, p. 52) explains that ecology works with the ‘if-then’ logic whereby, “if we take too much from nature, and treat nature with disrespect, we shall suffer the consequences, but if we treat nature respectfully, then we’ll receive the things we need”. This is what is expressed and experienced in the “Pikhaha” tale. When humans respect the environment by following the principles laid down by the flora, they benefit from the available environmental resources. Nevertheless, when humans disrespect and deteriorate the environment by cutting down trees and grasses, they suffer from Malaria, tuberculosis and other infections. Nanson expounds:

So the fairies’ revenge is a metaphor of the rebounding consequences of the human abuse of nature: cancers caused by chemical pollution and exploitation of the environment, pandemics caused by increasingly invasive penetration and exploitation of the wild ecosystem...

As the analysis of the tale “Umutwa Vesu” illustrates, the flora of the eco-

system does not just provide nourishment to the people but also lays down principles of co-existence. In tale, for instance, the voice from a litamba tree commands human beings to bow down when wind blows to thank the gods for letting enough rain to fall in the season.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a background to the understanding of the African oral literature in a new way. With the presentation, analysis and eco-critical juxtaposition of the Sangu plant tales, it shows that the Sangu, as a people, have the awareness about the environment of the Usangu plain. The Sangu are cognisant of the fact that their life depends on the environment and that the up-keep of it, enhances health living. They are mindful of the reality that it is the human part of the ecosystem that is responsible for the up-keep or devastation of the physical environment. The analysis and discussion of these three tales negates the long-lived misconception that an African individual person is incapable of developing understanding and practical skills to handle life and its challenges. Ogungbure (2013, p. 12) further explains:

In Tempels' view, if an African is asked to explain his world view on the nature of existence and the universe as a whole, one should not expect him to give a systematic account of his ontological system. But this does not in any way mean that such ontology does not exist; the African is only incapable of articulating his system of thought. He desperately needs help; this help lies in using Western paradigms and methods of analysis to systematize and logically present the primitive thinking of the African in a coherent manner. As colourful as this pattern of thinking is, it is simply an undisguised form of ethnocentrism, an offshoot of the colonial mentality which believes that Africans lack the general awareness or the possession of information and the acquisition of knowledge to transcend the bounds of credulity, and certain basic environmental limitations. This explication, in part, portrays the basis of the rejection of African indigenous knowledge as inferior to its Western equivalent.

The tales shown that the Eurocentric mentality on Africa and the African people is delusive. Africans are first of all aware of the environments that surround them. They know in this case, the plants and all vegetation by names and characteristics. They are aware of the ecological fact that their lives depend solely on plants and that the up-keep of plants relates directly to the wellness of their lives.

This awareness makes African endogenous knowledge an important noesis to be included in the thinking and decision making processes related to the fight against environmental degradation worldwide. Ayaa (2013, p. 150) insists:

...joint deliberations, reflections and negotiations on the suitable and appropriate types of indigenous and scientific approaches for integration and the methods to be adopted are critical in the process of designing an integrated frame work. Besides, a guided discussion and negotiations between all stakeholders about the suitability and compatibility of the identified indigenous knowledge systems and scientific approaches for integration, the design of a monitoring evaluation system and the performance indicators for future use is critical.

Such deliberations, reflections, negotiations and related efforts must base on a particular society's oral literature. Oral literature is one of the areas that need to be given significant attention if one needs to truly understand a society. Kiyimba (2001, p. 1) contends:

This literature, in spite of the colonial and post-colonial modernisations, which have caused some changes in it and in society in general, is still very much alive. It is the literature to which children are exposed from their earliest days, and it has the capacity to influence their view of themselves and others.

Kiyimba's stance is based on the oral literature of the African people is the means through which precious knowledge, skills, wisdoms and perceptions of societies are stored for use in the present time and the future. Thus, more studies on the oral literature of the African people need be conducted as a means to acquire knowledge on sustainably combating environmental-related problems that haunt the world today.

References

- Aghoghovwia, P. 2014, *Ecocriticism and the Oil Encounter: Readings from the Niger Delta*, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.
- Beek, W. 2017, *The transmission of Kapsiki-Higi folktales over two generations: tales that come, tales that go*, Palgrave Macmillan, Blacksburg.
- Caminero-Santangelo, B. 2014, *Different shades of green: African literature, environmental justice, and political ecology*, University of Virginia Press, Virginia, VA.
- Coombe, C., et al. (eds) 2020, *Professionalizing your English language teaching*. Springer, Switzerland.

- Ember, C., and Ember, M. 2009, *Cross-Cultural Research Methods*, AltaMira Press, New York, NY.
- Erdoes, R. and Alfonso, O. (eds) (1984), *American Indian Myths and Legends*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY.
- Finnegan, R. 2012, *Oral literature in Africa*, Open Book Publishers, Cambridge.
- Given, L. 2008, *The SAGE encyclopaedia of qualitative research methods*, 1st ed., SAGE Publications, Inc., Los Angeles & London.
- Hines, D. and Eckman, K. 1993, Indigenous multipurpose trees of Tanzania: uses and economic benefits for people, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Working Paper.
- Hountondji, P. 2009, Knowledge of Africa, knowledge by Africans: two perspectives on African Studies, *RCCS Annual Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 121-131.
- Ikeke, M. 2013, The forest in African traditional thought and practice: an ecophilosophical discourse, *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 345-50.
- Jacob, L., and Jakob, N. (eds) 2019, *Context in literary and cultural studies*, UCL Press, London.
- Kaajan, M. 2012, *The Verbal System of Sangu, a Bantu Language from South west Tanzania*, M. A. Dissertation, VU University.
- Kalenge, M. 2012, *Sangu Songs: A Changing Tradition*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Kangalawe, R., Mwamfupe, D. and Mbonile, M. 2007, Land management systems and their environmental impacts in the Usangu plains, Tanzania, *Journal of the Geographical Association of Tanzania*, vol. 32, pp. 15-32.
- Kiyimba, A. 2001, *Gender stereotypes in the folktales and proverbs of the Baganda*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Mgaya, E. 2020, *traditional institutions' management of sacred forests in Tanzania: history, narratives, and evidence from Njombe region, 1880s-2019* PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington.
- Mng'ong'o, M., Munishi, L., Blake, W., Comber, S., Hutchinson, T. and Ndakidemi, P. 2021, Soil fertility and land sustainability in Usangu Basin-Tanzania, *Heliyon*, vol. 7, pp. 1-12.

- Nanson, A. 2021, *Storytelling and ecology: empathy, enchantment and emergence in the use of oral narratives*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- Nzali, A. and Abiud, K. 2019, Prospects and challenges of village land forest reserves management in Mbarali district, Tanzania, *Open Journal of Forestry*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 159–67.
- Ogungbure, A. 2013, African indigenous knowledge: scientific or unscientific? *Inkanyiso: Jnl Hum & Soc Sci*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 12-20.
- Okpewho, I. 1992, *African oral literature: backgrounds, character, and continuity*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, IN.
- Rugg, G. and Petre, M. 2006, *A gentle guide to research methods*, 1st ed., Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Seitel, P. 1999, *The powers of genre: interpreting Haya oral literature*, Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics, 22, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Sirima, A. 2010, *Protected areas, tourism and human displacement in Tanzania: interests and challenges behind Ruaha National Park expansion*, MSc Dissertation, Wageningen University and Research Centre.
- Walia, G. 2014, The role of context in textual understanding of literature, *The Criterion an International Journal of English*, vol. 5, no 1, pp. 322-329.
- Walsh, M. 1995, Snakes on the Usangu plains: an introduction to Sangu Ethnoherpetology, *East Africa Natural History Bulletin*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 38-43.
- Zwaal, N. 2008, *Narratives for nature: storytelling as a vehicle for improving the intercultural dialogue on environmental conservation in Cameroon*, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, Riga Latvia.

Appendices

This part of the paper presents plant narratives of the Sangu people that through analysis have helped to construe endogenous environment-

related knowledge embedded in them. The tales were rendered in Shisango and translated into English. This section, therefore, submits the tales in both Shisango and English in order for the tales to be understood by a wider audience.

Umutwa Vesu

Pamwandi amapishi na masoli goona gayongoswaga ni litamba. Litamba lyalongaga wiita Nguluvi ni shawuti ya wutwa. Penekhandi uwupepo wiifuma, ishawuti yakhumige mulitamba kuti, amapishi na masoli goona gabindamage na kufugama na khufunya kwa Nguluvi ye ikhutupela ishakiilya.

Ishawuti ya mulitamba wajele, Majebele”, amajebele goona giyiimba, “Nguluvi, Nguluvi shidunda sha shifuku”. Penekhandi ilitamba lijele, “Mupunga”, umupunga goona gwiyiimbaga, “Nguluvi, Nguluvi shipelo sha shakiilya.” Ndeno amangamba, wulesi, makhondo na mapishi na masoli goona gayimbaga penekhandi ishawuti yiimbaga.

Amapishi na masoli gegikhanaga khufunya khwa Nguluvi, gakhalaga, gidenyekhaga na kiiwola baho. Ilitamba lyaletaga ilijuwa, mang’onyo ni fidudu vingi kiibuda amapishi na masoli gegina mbedaji kuutwa waakwe.

Baheene mbakha neng’ana penekhandi uwupepo wiifuma, amapishi na masoli goona giikina kuwupopo kifunya kwa Nguluvi kwa nsengo yaakwe na khwa shakiilya na fivu fingu vinofu.

English translation

Once upon a time, all the vegetation was ruled by the litamba tree. As the chief of vegetation, litamba spoke like God. Whenever wind blew, the voice was heard instructing all the vegetation to bow and kneel down to the God who provides the food.

When the voice from litamba tree said, “Maize”, the maize plants replied by singing, “God, God you are the mountain of the rain season.” When the litamba tree said, “Rice”, the paddy sang, “God, God the provider of food.” This happened to potatoes, finger millet, baobab trees and all the vegetation.

The vegetation that refused to adore, weathered, dried, fell down and decayed. The litamba tree brought the sun, worms and other decomposers to kill the vegetation that despised the chieftainship of litamba.

That is why, till today when wind blows, all the vegetation dance to the wind for the work done and the availability of food and other provisions.

Umukhondo Gwishemela

Umukhondo gwaali mutwa gwa mapishi ga matunda goona. Ilisiku limonga, Mukhondo gwashemelile amapishi ga matunda goona (Musada, Mutovo, Mupelemehe na mapishi gangi molofu hela) pashikalo sha khulongana kukhusu

itabia ya wujanja wa vaanu ni mwandunga ya khidumula, khidenya na kiibuda amapishi. Baheene, mapaisi goona gayimaga na kiyimba ulwimba kabla ya shikalo kiyansa:

Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Asikhatuvalafyaga muunu ose.
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose ti mapishi!
Onye kiihuda na mang'anga avanitu.

Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose tiikhata inyi iyi yoona!
Mapishi! Mapishi! Ose tiikhata inyi iyi yoona!
Asikhatuvalafyaga muunu ose.

Baheene umukhondo wayaansaga kiijova:

Omwe vaanu vaangu! Nivashemelile panu kunjowo sa vaanu ni mwandunga. One nilikholela kiifwa, inyi yangu iyi yikhasigala yingaya mapishi. Avaanu na mwandunga vihagula amapishi manofu, vikataa na kigwiisa nu moto, tiigwa mbakha pansu na kiifwa nsiku soona. Tidubuda lakini vasipulikha. Ulusawo lwesu lwisila duguli lakini viyendelea nu wujanja wawo. Ino nivashemelile panu kulamula. Tihagule kuwadaga, kuwabuda au kuvalekha. One nisakha tivabude woona tipu.

Ishikalo shali kitali sana, kiikhuma lwamilawu mbakha shamihe. Baheene amapishi galamula amambo aga:

1. L
usawulwa. Amapishi goona gadagage avaanu ni mwanduga khwa magoha nu munusi na finu vingi fya muhwanano.
2. W
iinatilo. Amapishi goona giinatilage avana wunofu. Penekhandi avaanu ni mwanduga viisakha kitegula avana, vagombolage.
3. W
ugane. Amapishi goona gakheelage wunofu. Amapishi gakhata pa ndaji yo yoona yila.

Lulweene mbakha neng'ana amapishi gana miifa na gangi giikhumya umunusi mubaya. Amapishi gihwinatila amatunda na amapishi madodo, gegilemba

mumapishi makhome. Amapishi makhome giliinda amapishi madodo wunofu sana.

English Translation

The baobab tree was the chief of all the fruit-bearing trees. One day, the baobab tree summoned all the fruit-bearing trees (Musada, Mutovo, Mupelemehe and many others) for a meeting to discuss the destructive behaviour of human beings and monkeys of clear-cutting, falling and killing trees. Before the discussion, the trees stood up and sang:

Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Do not disgust us.
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
Trees! Trees! We are the trees!
You strike our children with stones.

Trees! Trees! We rule all this land!
Trees! Trees! We rule all this land!

Do not disgust us.

Then Mukhondo started the discussion by saying:

My people! I have called you here to discuss issues about human beings and monkeys. I am about to die, lest my land remain without a tree. Human beings and monkeys choose beautiful trees, cut them and fall them by fire, we fall down and die all the days. We cry but they don't listen. Our generation is demising but they still destroy us. Now, I have called you here so we can decide. We should choose to chase them away from our domicile, to kill them or let them continue with their destructive behaviour. I suggest we kill them all.

The meeting was long, from morning to evening. Then the meeting made these three decisions:

1. R
ope. All the trees should chase away human beings and monkeys by using spears and unpleasant smell and other related-substances.
2. H
old in place. All the trees should fasten their children up so that when humans and monkeys

come for plucking, they fail.

3.

ove. Trees should love each other. Trees should not quarrel over anything.

That is why until to-date trees have stings and others release unpleasant smells. The trees fasten their fruits and the small trees grow and climb on big trees. The big trees protect the small trees very well.

Pikhaha

Pamwandi iwusangu yaali nofu sana. Gakhwaali amapishi manofu gegagubikhwe na makhamba pashanya poona. Amapishi ga wusangu gahalonganige nu Nguluwoi na khileti nonya. Avasangu vakhapatige magoda mumapishi na mumasoli mwikhaha umo. Avasangu penevahasakha mugoda na mapishi gakujengela inyumba, vawombaga khwa mapishi ga mumakhaha wiita, "Tilomba amapishi, onye mapishi ge mugoda; onye mapishi ge nyumba."

Ilisiku limonga, Mukhondo (mulongosi gwa mapishi) wajovaga khwa vaanu isheria sa mapishi na masoli goona ndeni visakha ifinu kukhuma kumapishi na masoli. Isheria yimonga yasakhaga avaanu valeghage kiihepa amapishi na masoli. Mukhondo wajele, "Ose tiisakha heshima. Musikhatukhepaga khwa hiinu sho shoona." Avaanu viitikile, "Tisikhavahepega nda!"

Baheene avaanu vaganiile kiva viinshi ni maali nyinshi, wayansaga kiidumula amapishi na masoli. Baheene, amapishi na masoli giyansaga kifwima na kiibuda avaanu khwa nsuguni ni homa, nu lugohomola na matamwa gangi molofu hela.

English Translation

Long time ago, Usangu was very beautiful. There were beautiful trees with beautiful canopies everywhere. The trees of Usangu were speaking to God and God brought rainfall. The Sangu got medicines in in the bush. When the Sangu people wanted medicines and trees for building houses, they asked for such needs from the trees of the bush saying, "We ask for trees, you, the trees are the medicine, you, the trees are the buildings."

One day, the baobab trees (leader of trees) announced principles needed to be followed if humans really need services from the flora. One of the principles wanted humans to respect the trees and grasses. The baobab tree said, "We want respect. Do not despise us for anything. Humans replied, "We will never despise you."

However, when humans increased in number and have had wealth, they started cutting down trees and grasses. Then, trees and grasses started to hunt and kill humans with mosquitos and fever, and tuberculosis and

L

many other diseases.
